TERROR

# TALES FROM THE CRYPT®

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DOUBLE-SIZED HORROR!

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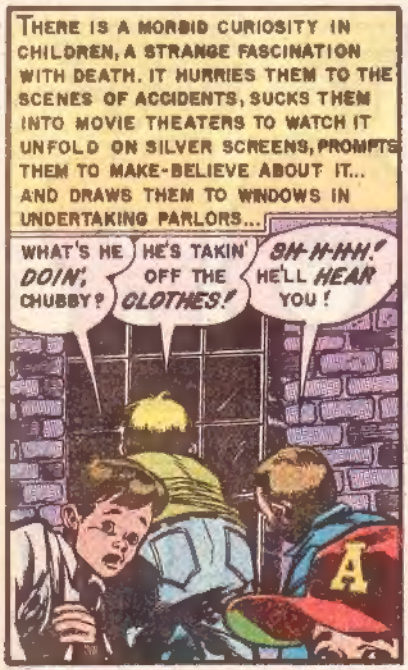
# TALES FROM THE CRYPT®

# THE CRYPT OF TERROR

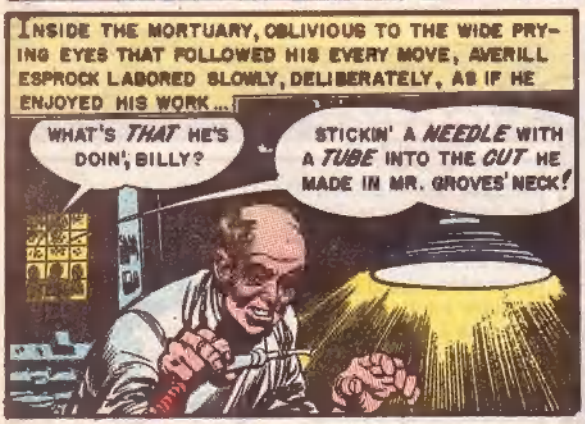
HEH, HEH! SO YOU'RE BACK FOR *MORE GORE*, EH, FIENDS? WELL, THIS IS THE SPOT *FOR* IT! WELCOME TO *THE CRYPT OF TERROR!* THIS IS YOUR *HOST* IN *HOWLS*, *THE CRYPT-KEEPER*, READY TO START THE *BRAWL* ROLLING IN MY *REEKING-RAG* WITH *ANOTHER SPINE-TINGLING TALE* FROM MY *CREEP-COLLECTION*. TIGHTEN YOUR *BELTS* SO YOU WON'T BE *SCARED* OUT OF YOUR *PANTS*, AND I'LL *BEGIN* THE *BLOOD-CURDLER* I CALL ...

## UNDERTAKING PALLOR

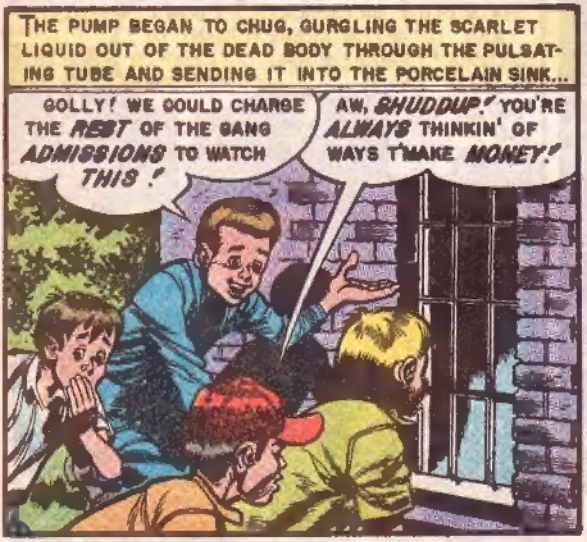

THERE IS A MORBID CURIOSITY IN CHILDREN, A STRANGE FASCINATION WITH DEATH. IT HURRIES THEM TO THE SCENES OF ACCIDENTS, SUCKS THEM INTO MOVIE THEATERS TO WATCH IT UNFOLD ON SILVER SCREENS, PROMPTS THEM TO MAKE-BELIEVE ABOUT IT... AND DRAWS THEM TO WINDOWS IN UNDERTAKING PARLORS...
WHAT'S HE DOIN', CHUBBY?
HE'S TAKIN' OFF THE CLOTHES!
SH-H-HH! HE'LL HEAR YOU!

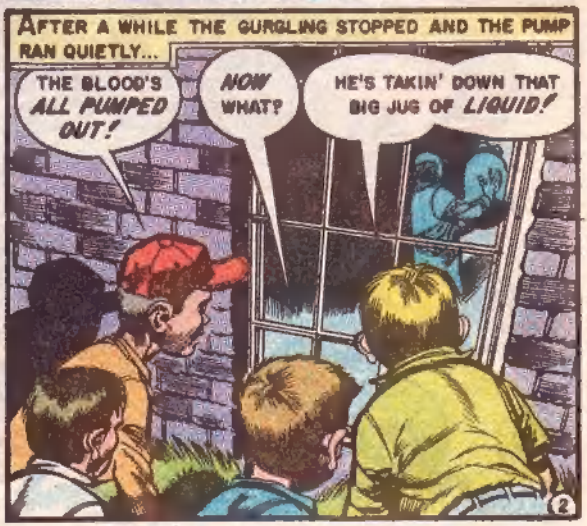
DEATH IS THE UNKNOWN IN THE LIFE EQUATION. IT IS THE ULTIMATE FINAL RESULT OF EVERY LIVING EXAMPLE. IT IS THE UNANSWERABLE TO YOUNG MINDS SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS...
NOW HE'S SHARPENING HIS SCALPEL!
GOLLY!
I DON'T FEEL SO GOOD!

SO IT WAS ONLY NATURAL FOR CHUBBY AND PETE AND BILLY AND PERCIVAL TO WANT TO SEE MORE OF THIS UNFATHOMABLE PROBLEM... TO WANT TO LEARN WHAT WENT ON BEHIND MR. ESPROCK'S CLOSED MORTUARY DOORS...
IF IT MAKES YOU SICK... DON'T LOOK, PERCY!
UGH! HE'S SLICING OLD MR. GROVES' SKIN AT THE BASE OF HIS NECK...


INSIDE THE MORTUARY, OBLIVIOUS TO THE WIDE PRYING EYES THAT FOLLOWED HIS EVERY MOVE, AVERILL ESPROCK LABORED SLOWLY, DELIBERATELY, AS IF HE ENJOYED HIS WORK...
WHAT'S THAT HE'S DOIN', BILLY?
STICKIN' A NEEDLE WITH A TUBE INTO THE CUT HE MADE IN MR. GROVES' NECK!

AND AS HE WORKED, AVERILL HUMMED SOFTLY, FILLING THE MORTUARY WITH HIS MUTED GREEN MUSIC...
HE'S TURNIN' ON SOME KIND OF MOTOR!
HE'S PUMPIN' OUT THE BLOOD, THAT'S WHAT HE'S DOIN'!
GHAAAA...


THE PUMP BEGAN TO CHUG, GURGLING THE SCARLET LIQUID OUT OF THE DEAD BODY THROUGH THE PULSATING TUBE AND SENDING IT INTO THE PORCELAIN SINK...
GOLLY! WE COULD CHARGE THE REST OF THE GANG ADMISSIONS TO WATCH THIS!
AW, SHUDDUP! YOU'RE ALWAYS THINKIN' OF WAYS T'MAKE MONEY!


AFTER A WHILE THE GURGLING STOPPED AND THE PUMP RAN QUIETLY...
THE BLOOD'S ALL PUMPED OUT!
NOW WHAT?
HE'S TAKIN' DOWN THAT BIG JUG OF LIQUID!

MR. ESPROCK RINSED THE HOSE THAT RAN OFF INTO THE RED-STAINED PORCELAIN SINK AND PUSHED IT INTO THE NECK OF THE JUG WITH THE COLORLESS LIQUID...

I'LL BET A NICKEL THAT'S *EMBALMIN'* FLUID!

I'LL BET YOU'RE *RIGHT!*

I'M GOIN' *HOME*, MY *PAW'S* BEEN *SICK* AND...

*STICK AROUND*, PERCY!

AVERILL PRESSED A SWITCH. THE PUMP REVERSED ITSELF. THE GURGLING BEGAN AGAIN. THE COLORLESS LIQUID IN THE JUG BEGAN TO SLOWLY DISAPPEAR, FORCED INTO MR. GROVES' EMPTY ARTERIES...

*SEE?* WHAT'D I *TELL* YOU?

OKAY, *SMART GUY!* SO YOU *KNOW EVERYTHING!*

*REALLY*, FELLERS. POP'S BEEN IN *BED*, AN...

*STICK AROUND*, PERCY!

THE LAST DROP OF THE EMBALMING FLUID GARGLED OUT OF THE JUG AS THE LAST DROP OF A SODA IS SUCKED FROM A FOUNTAIN GLASS THROUGH A FRAYED STRAW. MR. ESPROCK SHUT OFF THE MOTOR...

IS HE DONE?

WAIT AN' SEE!

LISTEN. SOMEONE JUST CAME IN THE FRONT DOOR.

SOMEWHERE IN THE MORTUARY, A BELL TINKLED. MR. ESPROCK STIFFENED. A FIGURE SWEPT ASIDE THE CURTAINS AND CAME INTO THE BACK ROOM...

*HOWDY*, AVERILL! I COME FOR MY *CUT!*

ANYBODY SEE YOU COME IN, MORT?

THE KIDS PEERING THROUGH THEIR PEEP-HOLE WHISPERED EXCITEDLY...

IT'S *MR. GRUDNY*, THE *DRUGGIST!* WHAT'S *HE* WANT?

*LISTEN!* MAYBE WE'LL *FIND OUT!*

NOPE... NOBODY *SAW* ME. HOW MUCH DO WE MAKE *THIS* TIME?

*FIFTY BUCKS EACH!* THAT'S THE *BEST* I COULD *DO!* THE *GROVES' FAMILY* DON'T *HAVE* MUCH *MONEY*. I FINALLY TALKED 'EM INTO THE *TWO HUNDRED DOLLAR FUNERAL*. I CLEAR A *HUNDRED* ON *THAT* ONE!

*FIFTY BUCKS!* FOR *CRYIN' OUT LOUD*, IT DON'T PAY TO TAKE SUCH *CHANCES* FOR *THAT* LITTLE DOUGH.

WELL, *NEXT* TIME YOU *POISON A PRESCRIPTION*, MAKE SURE IT'S FOR SOMEBODY WHO CAN *AFFORD* A *BIG* FUNERAL...

WHAT'D YA THINK? I GET A CHANCE TO DO IT EVERY DAY IN THE WEEK? I GOT TO WAIT TILL SOMEBODY GETS SICK FIRST... AND NEEDS A PRESCRIPTION FILLED!
I KNOW! I KNOW! DON'T GET SORE!

I'M NOT SORE. IN FACT, I FEEL PRETTY GOOD! THE NEXT FUNERAL YOU GET WILL BE THE BIGGEST ONE THIS TOWN'S EVER SEEN!
WHO'S SICK, MORT?

NOBODY BUT THE RICHEST MAN IN TOWN... AND I DELIVERED HIS PRESCRIPTION THIS MORNING!
HEH, HEH! GOOD! GOOD! WE OUGHT TO KNOW BY TONIGHT...

OUTSIDE, THE KIDS LOOKED AT EACH OTHER, HORRIFIED.
THE RICHEST GUY IN TOWN!? WHY THAT'S PERCY'S OLD MAN...
HEY, WHERE IS PERCY?
HE'S NOT HERE!

DO YOU THINK HE HEARD?
I DON'T THINK SO! GOLLY, WHAT'LL WE DO?
O'MON!

BILLY AND CHUBBY AND PETE TORE OUT OF THE ALLEYWAY BEHIND MR. ESPROCK'S MORTUARY AND RAN ALL THE WAY TO PERCY'S HOUSE. WHEN THEY GOT THERE, THEY FOUND PERCY SITTING ON THE FRONT STEPS, SOBBING...
PERCY! YA GOTTA LISTEN.
MR. GRUDNY AND MR. ESPROCK... HEY, WHAT'S WRONG, PERC?
MY...SOB... MY POP! HE DIED A LITTLE... SOB...LITTLE WHILE AGO!
GOLLY, GEE!

THEY WERE TOO LATE. THEY STOOD AROUND AWKWARDLY, WONDERING WHAT TO SAY TO POOR GRIEVING PERCY, AND THEN THEY LEFT HIM QUIETLY SOBBING...
IT'S BETTER THAT PERCY DOESN'T KNOW THAT MR. GRUDNY, THE DRUGGIST, POISONED HIS OLD MAN...
...AND THAT HE'S WORKING IN CAHOOTS WITH MR. ESPROCK, THE UNDERTAKER...
DO YOU THINK WE OUGHT TO TELL THE COPS?

AW, THEY WOULDN'T BELIEVE US ANYWAY... A COUPLE OF KIDS!
YEAH. WE GOT TO TAKE CARE OF THIS OURSELVES!
BUT, HOW?...

THE NEXT DAY, PETE AND BILLY AND CHUBBY WERE AT THEIR PEEPHOLE, WATCHING MR. ESPROCK EMBALM PERCY'S FATHER...
HERE COMES MR. GRUDNY!
SH-H-H-H... LISTEN...

HEH, HEH! WELL, AVERILL. DID YOU STICK 'EM GOOD?
THREE GRAND WORTH! WE CLEAR ONE THOUSAND. THAT'S FIVE HUNDRED APIECE!

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT. ER... WHAT'S WRONG, AVERILL? YOU DON'T LOOK GOOD!
ME? I FEEL ALL RIGHT, MORT! WHY?

I DON'T KNOW! YOU LOOK PALE... RUN DOWN. YOU LOOK LIKE YOU NEED A TONIC! I'LL SEND ONE OVER...
DON'T BOTHER. IT'S THE EXCITEMENT, I GUESS!

OUTSIDE, PETE GRINNED...
I JUST GOT AN IDEA, FELLERS!
TELL US LATER, PETE. LISTEN...

THE FUNERAL'S TOMORROW MORNING, MORT. I'LL PROBABLY GET PAID TOMORROW NIGHT! MEET ME AT THE USUAL PLACE, AND I'LL GIVE YOU YOUR SHARE.
FINE. SAY AROUND MIDNIGHT...

HE'S GONE! WHAT'S YOUR IDEA, PETE?
CHUBBY, YOU GET DOWN TO GRUDNY'S DRUG STORE AND YOU HANG AROUND IN FRONT... STAY THERE ALL DAY IF YOU HAVE TO!

WHEN HE GIVES YOU A PACKAGE TO DELIVER TO MR. ESPROCK, DON'T BRING IT TO HIM. BRING IT TO OUR CLUBHOUSE, UNDERSTAND?
RIGHT!

AFTER CHUBBY LEFT, PETE TOLD HIS PLAN TO BILLY. THEN THEY WENT AROUND TO THE FRONT OF MR. ESPROCK'S MORTUARY AND WAITED. THEY WAITED UNTIL MR. ESPROCK CAME OUT...

HI, MR. ESPROCK. SAY, *WHAT'S WRONG?*

*HUH? WRONG?*

YOU DON'T *LOOK* SO GOOD, MR. ESPROCK!

YOU LOOK *PALE*, MR. ESPROCK. YOU LOOK *SICK!*

YOU *COMIN'* *DOWN* WITH SOMETHIN', MR. ESPROCK?

I DON'T *KNOW!* I... *EXCUSE* ME, BOYS.

MR. ESPROCK WENT BACK INTO THE MORTUARY. THE KIDS DARTED AROUND TO THE BACK WINDOW IN TIME TO HEAR...

HELLO, *MORT? AVERILL!* SAY... ER...MAYBE YOU'D *BETTER* SEND THAT *TONIC* OVER *AFTER ALL!* I *DO* FEEL KINDA...KINDA *RUN DOWN!*

OUTSIDE MR. GRUDNY'S STORE, CHUBBY WAITED PATIENTLY. FINALLY, MR. GRUDNY CAME OUT...

HOW'D YOU LIKE TO MAKE A *NICKEL*, CHUBBY? DELIVER THIS PACKAGE OVER T' *MR. ESPROCK* AT THE *UNDER-TAKING PARLOR...*

*SURE THING*, MR. GRUDNY!

CHUBBY TOOK THE PACKAGE AND RUSHED STRAIGHT TO THE CLUB HOUSE WITH IT. PETE AND BILLY WERE WAITING...

*HERE IT IS!*

OKAY, *POUR IT OUT...*

HERE'S THE *RAT-POISON...*

MR. ESPROCK OPENED THE DOOR TO HIS MORTUARY TO SEE CHUBBY STANDING BEFORE HIM, HOLDING A STRAY CAT IN ONE HAND AND THE BOTTLE OF 'TONIC' IN THE OTHER...

MR. GRUDNY ASKED ME TO *DELIVER* THIS, MR. ESPROCK!

OH, *THANK* YOU, CHUBBY!

CHUBBY HELD OUT THE BOTTLE OF 'TONIC', LETTING IT SLIP FROM HIS FINGERS...!

HERE Y'ARE... *OOOPS!*

*LOOK OUT, YOU...CLUMSY...*

THE BOTTLE SMASHED INTO A THOUSAND GLITTERING FRAGMENTS AND THE 'TONIC' POOLED OUT OVER THE MORTUARY FLOOR. CHUBBY RELEASED THE STRAY CAT...

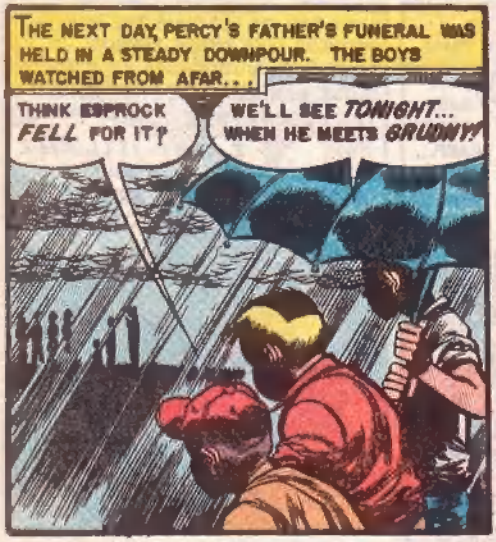
GOLLY! I'M *SORRY*, MR. ESPROCK. I...I *HERE, KITTY!*

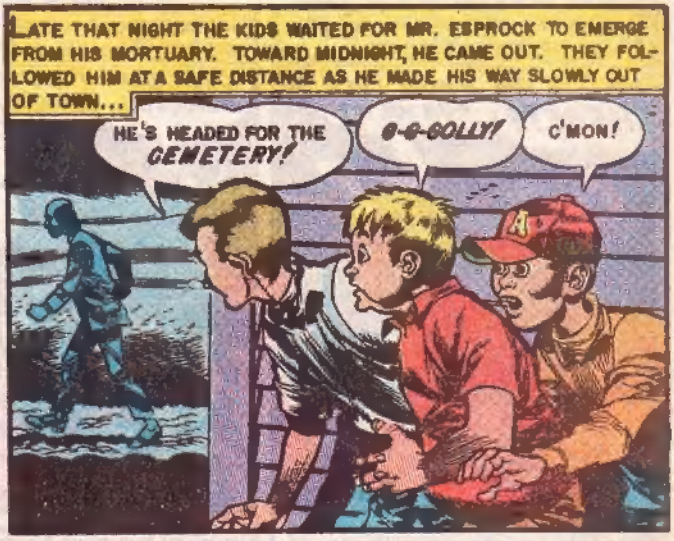
GET THAT *CAT* OUT OF HERE!

THE CAT WAS BUSILY LAPPING UP THE SPILLED TONIC. CHUBBY HESITATED...
I SAID GET THAT CAT OUT OF HERE!
LOOK, MR. ESPROCK!

THE CAT WAVERED, FILLED WITH THE RAT-POISON. IT SQUEALED AND ROLLED OVER...
WHAT HAPPENED TO IT?
GOOD LORD... IT'S DEAD!

MR. ESPROCK STUCK HIS FINGER INTO THE POOL OF 'TONIC' AND SNIFFED IT...
WHY THAT DIRTY DOUBLE-CROSSING... THIS IS POISON!
WELL, I GOT TO GO, MR. ESPROCK!


THE NEXT DAY, PERCY'S FATHER'S FUNERAL WAS HELD IN A STEADY DOWNPOUR. THE BOYS WATCHED FROM AFAR...
THINK ESPROCK FELL FOR IT?
WE'LL SEE TONIGHT... WHEN HE MEETS GRUDNY!


LATE THAT NIGHT THE KIDS WAITED FOR MR. ESPROCK TO EMERGE FROM HIS MORTUARY. TOWARD MIDNIGHT, HE CAME OUT. THEY FOLLOWED HIM AT A SAFE DISTANCE AS HE MADE HIS WAY SLOWLY OUT OF TOWN...
HE'S HEADED FOR THE CEMETERY!
G-G-GOLLY!
C'MON!

PETE AND BILLY AND CHUBBY FOLLOWED MR. ESPROCK INTO THE CEMETERY. MR. GRUDNY WAS WAITING...
THAT YOU, AVERILL?
SURPRISED, GRUDNY? YOU THOUGHT I'D BE DEAD BY NOW, DIDN'T YOU?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, AVERILL?
I'M TALKING ABOUT THAT POISONED TONIC YOU SENT ME, MORT. LUCKILY, THE KID DROPPED IT!

THE KNIFE IN MR. ESPROCK'S HAND GLINTED IN THE MOONLIGHT...

AVERILL! DON'T BE A FOOL!

YOU TRIED TO KILL ME, GRUDNY. WELL NOW... I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!

MR. ESPROCK BROUGHT THE KNIFE DOWN INTO MR. GRUDNY'S CHEST. MR. GRUDNY'S SCREAM ECHOED THROUGH THE SILENT CEMETERY...

YAAAAAAAAA

SUDDENLY THE NIGHT WAS VERY STILL, SAVE FOR AVERILL ESPROCK'S HEAVY BREATHING AS HE STOOD OVER MORT GRUDNY'S GROTESQUELY SPRAWLED BODY. AND THEN...

AAAAOHOOO!

WHO'S THERE?

GOLLY!

MR. ESPROCK SPUN AROUND, THE KNIFE GRIPPED TIGHTLY IN HIS HAND...

WHO'S THERE!?

C'MON! LET'S RUN FOR IT!

THE KIDS BEGAN TO RUN. MR. ESPROCK SCREAMED AFTER THEM...

COME BACK HERE, YOU...

C'MON, CHUBBY!

I... GASP... I CAN'T... GASP... RUN... ANY... FASTER...

THEY RAN WILDLY OVER THE GRAVE-MOUNDS... THE THREE TERRORIZED BOYS WITH MURDEROUS MR. ESPROCK CLOSE BEHIND THEM, BRANDISHING THE BLOODY KNIFE...

RUN, CHUBBY! RUN!

I...CAN'T...

I'LL KILL YOU! I SWEAR IT! I'LL...

SUDDENLY, MR. ESPROCK PLUNGED FORWARD, SPLATTERING HIS HEAD UPON THE SHARP CORNER OF A NEWLY CUT TOMBSTONE...

AND WHEN THE BOYS CAUTIOUSLY RETURNED TO WHERE HE LAY...

HE'S... DEAD!

LOOK! LOOK AT THE NAME ON THE HEAD-STONE!

IT'S PERCY'S FATHER'S GRAVE...

HEH, HEH! THERE'S A STRIKING WIND-UP TO A TERROR-TALE, EH, CREEPS? NOW, THE VAULT-KEEPER AWAITS WITH HIS TALE OF COFFINS AND CADAVERS, SO I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO HIM. I'LL DIG YOU LATER. TALKING 'BOUT DIGGING, AS THE FRENCH BEE-BOPPER SAID WHEN HE SAW THE GUILLOTINE... 'MAN, DIG THAT CRAZY BARBER CHAIR!'

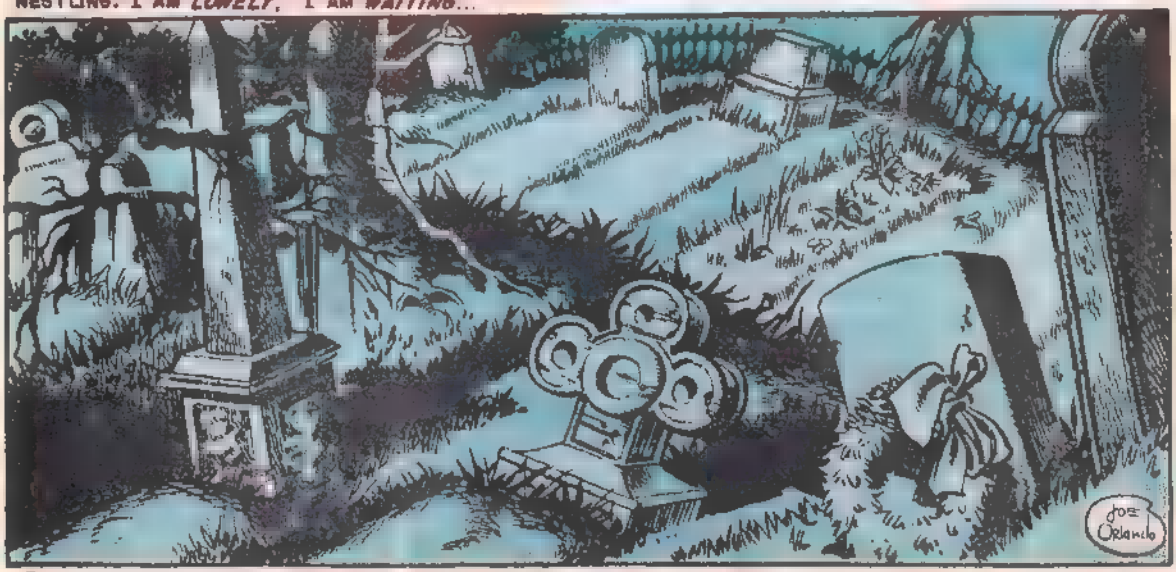
THE END...

# THE VAULT OF HORROR!®

HEH, HEH. AND *NOW, VULTURES*, IF YOU WILL *VENTURE* INTO THE *VAULT OF HORROR*, YOUR HOST, *THE VAULT-KEEPER* WILL *ENTERTAIN* YOU. FOR *THIS*, MY OFFERING IN *C.K.'S MAG*, I HAVE CHOSEN A *GRAVE TALE. YEP!* IT'S *TOLD BY A GRAVE!* SO, CUDDLE UP TO THAT *CORPSE* OVER THERE AND I'LL BEGIN THE DRAMA OF *DREAD* AND *DEATH* CALLED...

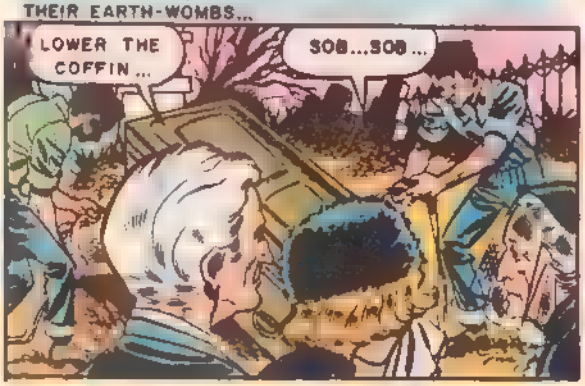
## THE CRAVING GRAVE!

THE WIND BLOWS SADLY ACROSS THE GNARLED AND BENT TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD STONE MONUMENTS THAT THE OTHERS PROUDLY HOLD UPWARD TOWARD THE NIGHT SKY. BUT UPON MY BREAST THERE IS NO COLD STONE FOR THE WIND TO SING OVER. I LIE SILENT WITH AN EMPTINESS WITHIN ME... A YEARNING. THE OTHERS SIGH CONTENTEDLY, SHIFTING AND CRACKING, EMBRACING THEIR CHARGES...THEIR RIGID CHILDREN. BUT I AM BARREN...FRUITLESS. BENEATH MY MOUNDED OUTER SKIN-CRUST, NO RIGID CHARGE LIES, NESTLING. I AM *LONELY*. I AM *WAITING*...

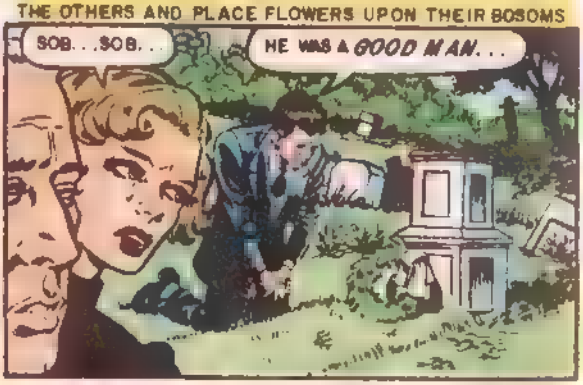



I AM AN *UNOCCUPIED GRAVE*, CRYING WITH THE CRYING WIND... WAITING FOR MY LONELINESS TO END...
*WAITING FOR A BODY!*

I HAVE WAITED LIKE THIS THROUGH THE CENTURIES, WATCHING THE OTHERS AROUND ME, EACH ■ THEIR TURN, OPEN WIDE THEIR YAWNING MOUTHS AND TAKE IN THEIR WARDS, CRADLING THEM HAPPILY WITHIN THEIR EARTH-WOMBS...

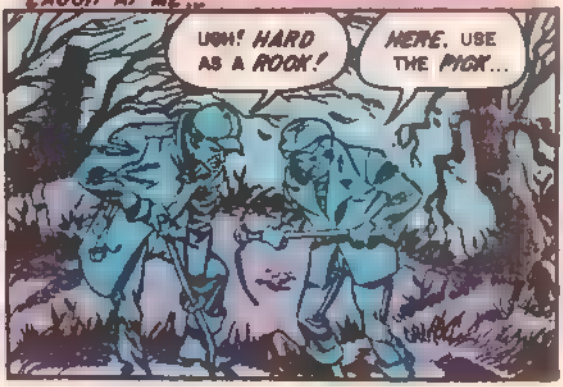



I HAVE LAIN FALLOW THROUGH THE FREEZES AND THE THAWS, HEARING THEM NURSING THEIR FOSTER-CHILDREN, AND LONGING FOR MY OWN. ON SUNDAYS, I HAVE LISTENED TO THE MOURNERS AND REMEMBERERS COME AND CRY UPON THE OTHERS AND PLACE FLOWERS UPON THEIR BOSOMS

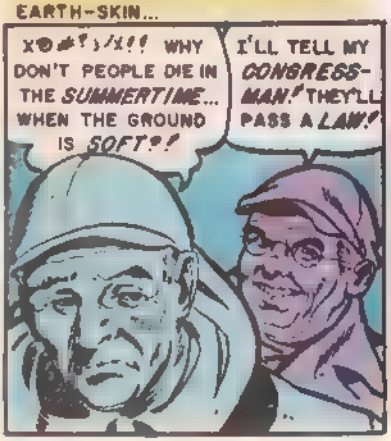



ON NIGHTS LIKE THIS ONE...WHEN THE SKY IS OVERCAST WITH LOW HANGI■ RAIN-CLOUDS, WHEN ■ CAN SEE NO STARS... I CAN ONLY LIE AND LISTEN TO THE HAPPY CHATTERING OF THE GRAVES AROUND ME GUARDING, PROTECTING, CARING FOR THEIR BROOD. I CAN ONLY LIE AND LISTEN AND YEARN. I YEARN FOR THE DAY WHEN I, *TOO*, WILL REACH FORTH AND DRAW IN MY DEATH-FETUS AND HOLD IT FAST, SUCKLING IT WITH MY DAMPNESS...

AND ALWAYS, WHEN THE WIND COMES UP ACROSS THE *OTHER* GRAVES, IT CARRIES THEIR *LAUGHTER* TO ME. THEY LAUGH BECAUSE THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEIR PURPOSE. THEY LAUGH BECAUSE THEY ARE NO LONGER EMPTY AND BARREN AND CHILDLESS. THEY *LAUGH AT ME*...



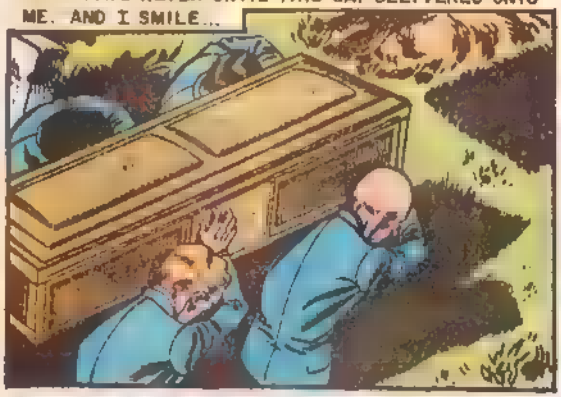

BUT, *WAIT!* WHAT IS THAT I *HEAR?! VOICES* IN THE WIND... *VOICES* IN THE NIGHT... *VOICES OVER ME!* AND WHAT ■ THAT I *FEEL?! COLD STEEL* RENTING MY CRUST... CRACKING OPEN MY EARTH-SKIN...



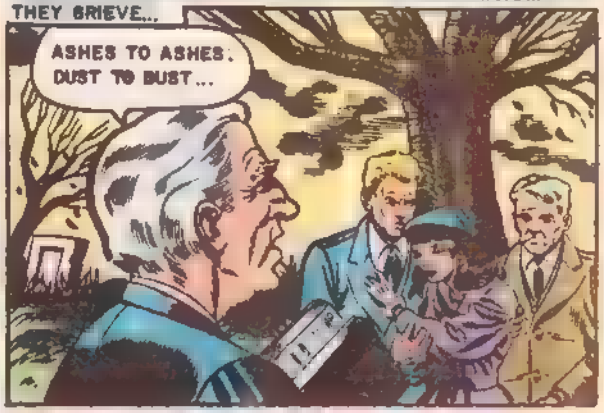

THERE IS A TREMBLING DOWN DEEP WITHIN ME... A SURGE OF EXCITEMENT AND ANTICIPATION. THE WIND DIES...AND THE LAUGHTER DIES...

ALL THESE YEARS OF WAITING. ALL THESE YEARS OF LONGING AND YEARNING AND CRYING. THEY'RE ALMOST OVER. THOSE MEN UPON MY CHEST...THEY'RE *GRAVE DIGGERS*...

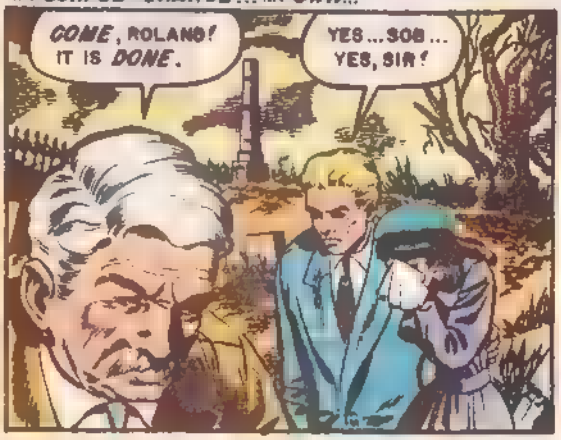
AND NOW IT IS MORNING. I LIE WITH MY INSIDES TORN FROM ME AND HEAPED UP AT MY SIDE. I LIE OPEN, FEELING THE SUNLIGHT...THE COLD AIR. I HEAR THE CRUNCHING STEPS THAT I HAVE HEARD SO OFTEN...HEAR THE GRUNTS OF THE PALLBEARERS THAT HAVE NEVER UNTIL THIS DAY DELIVERED UNTO ME. AND I SMILE...



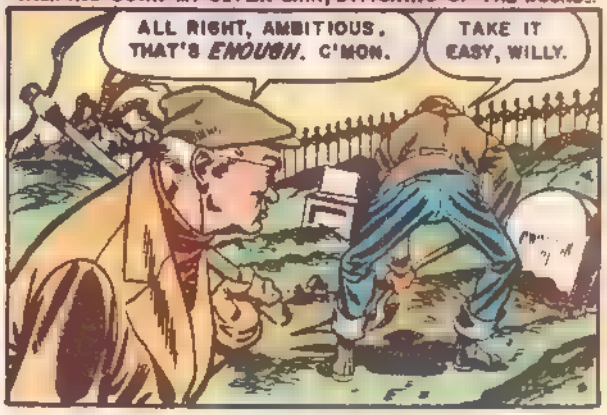
I LISTEN WITH A DRUNKEN JOY TO THE CEREMONY, FEELING THE MOURNERS' FEET UPON MY BREAST. THERE ARE NOT MANY MOURNERS... A NEPHEW, HIS WIFE, AND A LAWYER-FRIEND. BUT I DO NOT CARE. IT IS NOT THE *GRIEVING* ONES I AM INTERESTED IN. IT IS THE ONE FOR *WHOM* THEY GRIEVE...



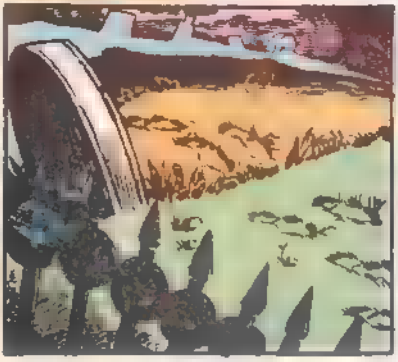

THE COFFIN IS LOWERED. I REACH UPWARD FOR IT, ACCEPTING IT, FEELING OF ITS SMOOTHNESS, AND SENSING OF ITS CONTENTS... MY *DEATH-WARD*... MY *CORPSE-CHARGE*... MY *OWN*...




THE MOURNERS LEAVE. THE GRAVE DIGGERS STEP FORWARD WITH THEIR SHOVELS. I EMBRACE THE COFFIN MORE AND MORE AS THEY RETURN MY SOIL-INNARDS TO ME. THEY STAND, FINALLY, UPON MY REPAIRED BODY, TAMPING DOWN MY OUTER SKIN, STITCHING UP THE WOUND...

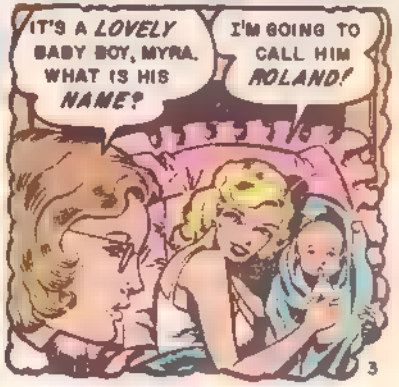



THE GRAVE DIGGERS TRUDGE OFF. I AM FULFILLED. THE EMPTINESS WITHIN ME IS GONE...THE YEARNING VANISHED. THE BODY LIES GUARDED INSIDE ME. I WHISPER TO IT... SOOTHING IT...COMFORTING IT IN ITS FINAL REST...



THE DAYS AND WEEKS PASS. BUT THE BODY WITHIN MY FOLD DOES NOT LIE AT REST. THE BODY WITHIN ME IS NOT AT PEACE. THERE IS A STIRRING INSIDE THE COFFIN NESTLING IN MY BOSOM. A FLUTTERING... A SCRATCHING...

THE BODY TELLS ME HER STORY. HER NAME IS CYNTHIA MEADOWS. SHE WAS, LIKE ME, LONELY ALL HER LIFE. SHE'D REMAINED UNMARRIED...BARREN, FRUITLESS... YEARNING FOR THE THINGS HER MARRIED SISTER ENJOYED.



THE BODY STIRRING WITHIN ME TELLS ME OF THE LONELY YEARS ... THE LONGING SHE'D FELT FOR A CHILD OF HER OWN. AND I UNDERSTAND. HADN'T I FELT THE SAME AS SHE?...

MAMA SAYS YOU'RE AN *OLD MAID*, AUNT CYNTHIA. WHAT'S AN OLD MAID?

IT'S... IT'S A WOMAN WHO NEVER MARRIES, ROLAND. A WOMAN WHO HAS NO CHILDREN OF HER OWN.

SHE'D FELT THE LAUGHTER ... THE SCORN AROUND HER... AS I'D FELT SCORN. SHE'D WATCHED THE OTHER WOMEN SHE KNEW MARRY AND HAVE CHILDREN, AND SHE'D *CRIED*... AS *I'D* CRIED...

SOB ... SOB...

*HURRY, EDITH! DINNER'S READY.*

YES, MOMMA!

AND THE EMPTY YEARS HAD CRAWLED BY... AS THEY'D CRAWLED FOR ME. SHE MADE WISE INVESTMENTS OF THE INHERITANCE SHE'D SHARED WITH HER SISTER, AND SHE'D GROWN WEALTHY. WHILE HER SISTER...

GEORGE'S *BUSINESS FAILED*, CYNTHIA. HE'S *LOST* EVERY CENT WE *HAD!*

I'M *SORRY*, MYRA. I'LL TRY TO *HELP* YOU!

AND SHE'D WAITED THROUGH THE YEARS ... AS I'D WAITED. FINALLY...

WHAT *IS* IT, GEORGE?

IT'S *MYRA*, CYNTHIA. SHE'S *DESPERATELY ILL*. *PLEASE*... COME, *QUICKLY!*

MYRA'D FALLEN ILL SUDDENLY. SHE'D DIED WITHIN THE WEEK...

WHAT... SOB... WHAT ABOUT *ROLAND*, CYNTHIA? WHAT WILL I *DO* WITH HIM?

I'LL... *I'LL* LOOK AFTER HIM, GEORGE... IF YOU *WANT* ME TO.

AND SO, THE LONELY YEARS HAD ENDED FOR CYNTHIA AS MY LONELY YEARS HAD ENDED. SHE'D TAKEN ROLAND TO HER BOSOM AS I'D TAKEN HER...

BUT I WANT MY *MOMMY!*

YOU MOTHER HAS GONE *AWAY*, ROLAND. SHE'S GONE AWAY FOR A LONG TIME.

ROLAND'S ARRIVAL IN CYNTHIA'S HOUSE HAD MEANT THE END OF THE LAUGHTER AROUND HER... THE END OF SCORN ... JUST AS *HER* ARRIVAL HAD MEANT THE END OF SCORN FOR *ME*...

*ROLAND! DINNER'S READY. HURRY.*

YES, AUNT CYNTHIA!

HMMPH!

CYNTHIA, TOO, HAD BEEN FULFILLED. SHE'D GUARDED ROLAND...COMFORTED HIM. AND HE'D GROWN INTO MANHOOD. BUT THERE WAS A STIRRING WITHIN HIM...JUST AS NOW, CYNTHIA STIRS...

I'M GOING AWAY, AUNT CYNTHIA. I CAN'T STAY HERE ANY LONGER.

ROLAND! DON'T LEAVE ME! PLEASE.

THE SCRATCHING, CLAWING BODY WITHIN ME TELLS HOW ROLAND HAD LEFT HER...DESPITE HER PLEADING... LEFT HER TO THE LAUGHTER AND THE SCORN AROUND HER ONCE MORE...

SOB...SOB...

AND THEN SHE'D DISCOVERED *WHY* ROLAND HAD LEFT SO SUDDENLY...

THE *MONEY!* I HAD *THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS* IN THIS DRAWER. IT'S *GONE!*

POOR CYNTHIA. HOW SORRY I FEEL FOR HER...TO YEARN FOR SOMETHING...TO YEARN FOR IT FOR SO LONG...TO FINALLY GET IT... AND THEN TO LOSE IT ONCE MORE. SHE TELLS ME OF HOW BROKEN-HEARTED SHE WAS...

ROLAND...SOB... ROLAND.

SHE TELLS ME HOW SHE'D TRIED TO FORGET HIM. SHE TELLS ME HOW HER INVESTMENTS HAD CONTINUED TO MAKE HER WEALTHIER AND WEALTHIER. AND THEN...SIX YEARS LATER...

YES, WHO IS IT? WHO...*ROLAND!* YOU'VE COME *BACK!*

YES, AUNT CYNTHIA. AND I'VE BROUGHT SOMEONE...

CYNTHIA'D BEEN SO GLAD TO SEE ROLAND SHE'D COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN THE CRIME HE'D COMMITTED WHEN HE'D LEFT...

THIS IS MY *WIFE ENID*, AUNT CYNTHIA. *ENID*, THIS IS *MY AUNT CYNTHIA*...

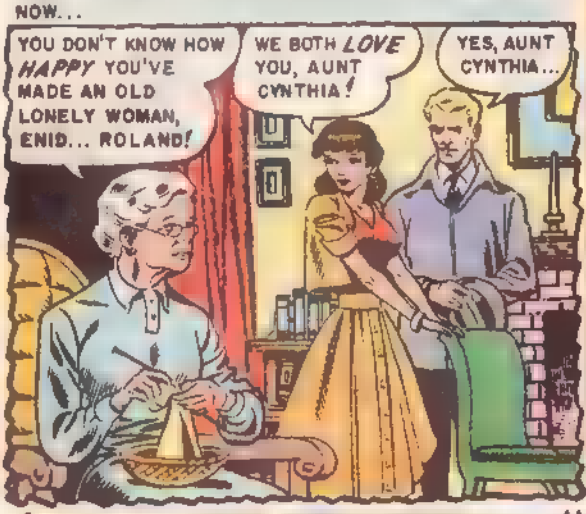
ROLAND'S TOLD ME *SO MUCH* ABOUT YOU, AUNT CYNTHIA!

THEY'D COME TO LIVE WITH HER. ROLAND'D BEGGED CYNTHIA'S FORGIVENESS...

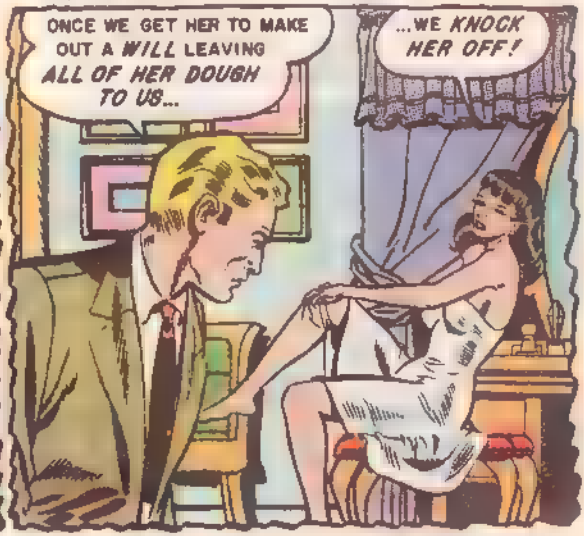
I WAS *YOUNG* AND *FOOLISH*, AUNT CYNTHIA. IT WAS *WRONG* OF ME TO TAKE THE MONEY! I'M *SORRY!*

THERE, THERE, ROLAND. IT HAPPENED A *LONG TIME AGO!*

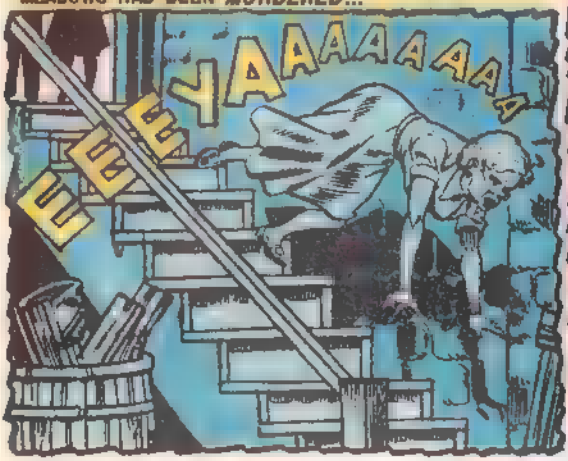
SO ONCE MORE THE LAUGHTER AND SCORN AROUND CYNTHIA'D DIED AWAY. ROLAND HAD COME BACK. AND HE'D BROUGHT HIS WIFE. CYNTHIA HAD *TWO* CHILDREN NOW...



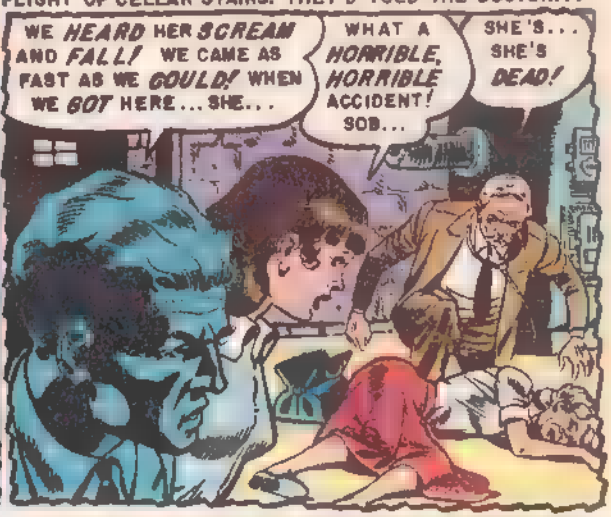

BUT THEN CYNTHIA TELLS ME WHAT ROLAND AND ENID HAD PLANNED...




AND NOW I KNOW WHY THE BODY I EMBRACE WITHIN MY EARTH-WOMB IS NOT AT PEACE. NOW I KNOW WHY IT SCRATCHES AND STIRS INSIDE. CYNTHIA MEADOWS HAD BEEN *MURDERED*...




HER NIECE AND NEPHEW HAD PUSHED HER DOWN A LONG FLIGHT OF CELLAR STAIRS. THEY'D TOLD THE DOCTOR...




THE BODY WITHIN ME TURNS AND PUSHES AND SCRATCHES. I TRY TO STOP IT... TRY TO MAKE MY INSIDES HARD... BUT IT IS DETERMINED. THEN, ONE NIGHT... MONTHS AFTER I HAD FIRST EMBRACED IT... THE BODY PUSHES UPWARD INTO THE COOL AIR... PUSHING OUTWARD PAST MY CRUST-SKIN...

DESPITE MY PLEADING, IT TOTTERS OFF... ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES... INTO THE COLD WIND... THE WIND THAT CARRIES BACK TO ME ONCE AGAIN THE LAUGHTER AND SCORN OF THE OTHERS...

AND WITHIN ME THERE IS AN EMPTINESS AND A YEARNING ONCE MORE. I AM LONELY ONCE MORE.

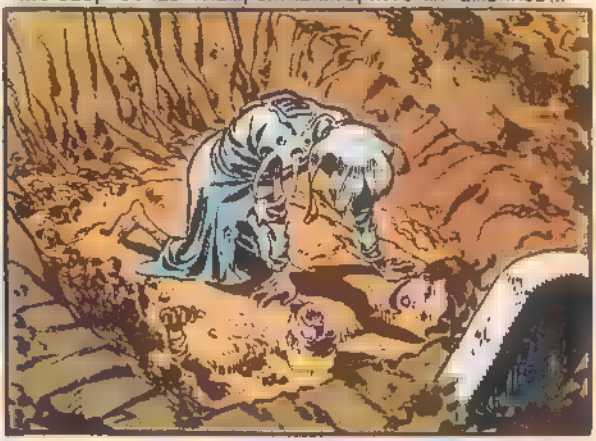
WE WERE THE *SAME*, CYNTHIA AND I... *BARREN* AND *FRUITLESS* AND *WAITING*. AND THEN THE WAITING ENDED FOR BOTH OF US. ROLAND WAS GIVEN TO HER, AND SHE TO ME. BUT LIKE ROLAND LEFT CYNTHIA TO THE LAUGHTER AND THE SCORN, SHE TOO HAS LEFT ME. NOW, I CAN ONLY DO AS SHE DID. TRY TO FORGET...

THE WIND BLOWS SADLY ACROSS THE GNARLED AND BENT TREES AROUND ME. IT WHISPERS PAST THE COLD STONES. I LIE SILENT WITH THE EMPTINESS WITHIN ME. AND I WAIT. AND THEN, ONE NIGHT, FAR AWAY... I HEAR IT. THE *SCREAMING*...

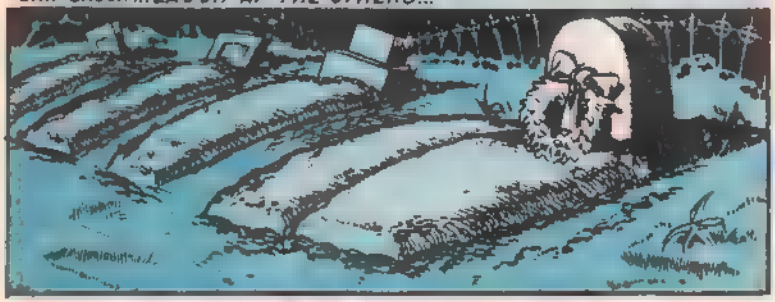
SOMETHING IS COMING TOWARD ME, DRAGGING THE SCREAMING BEHIND IT...

IT IS CYNTHIA. SHE HOLDS THEM IN HER VICE-LIKE GRIP AND STAGGERS ACROSS THE OTHER GRAVES... THE OTHER GRAVES THAT HAVE SUDDENLY STOPPED LAUGHING. SHE HOLDS THEM...ROLAND AND ENID... *HOLDS THEM OUT TO ME*...

...AND I REACH FOR THEM. CYNTHIA HELPS ME REACH. SHE SHOVES ASIDE MY SKIN-CRUST, SCOOPS OUT MY INSIDES, PUSHES THEM, SHRIEKING, INTO MY EMBRACE...



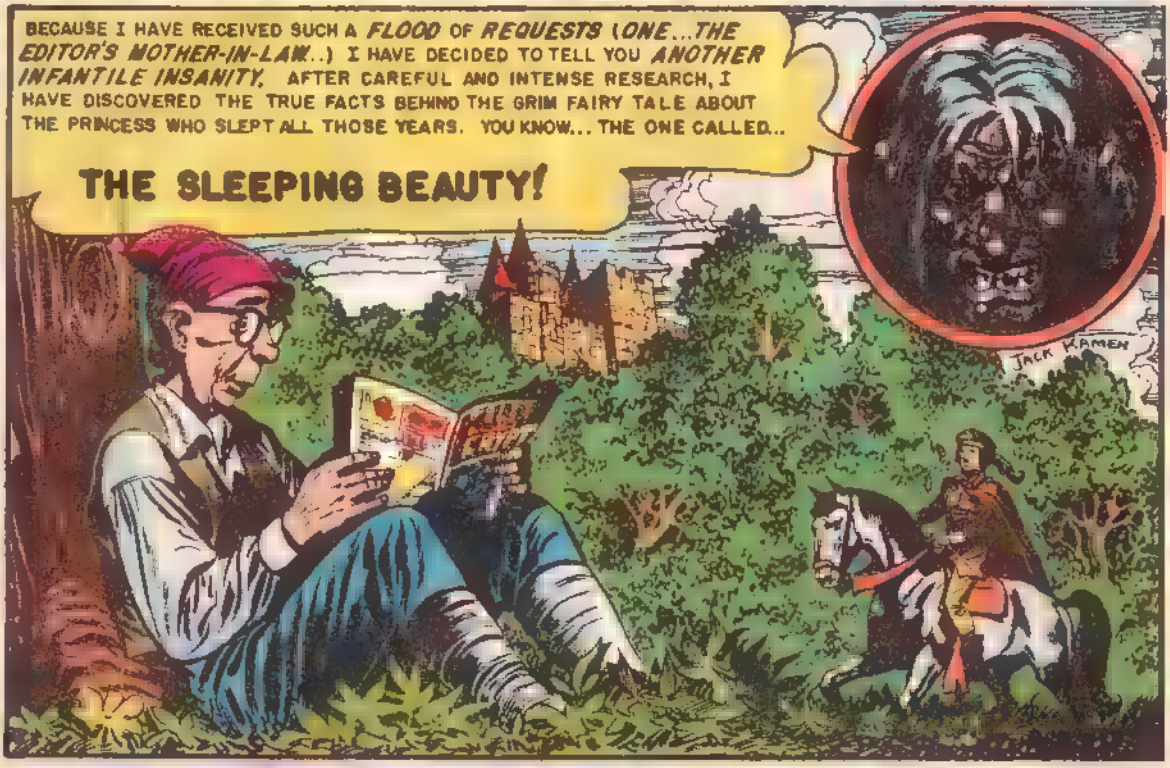
CYNTHIA IS GONE AWAY, NOW. THE SCREAMING HAS STOPPED. YES, WE *WERE* ALIKE, SHE AND I. EACH WAITED...EACH GOT WHAT SHE WAITED FOR... ONLY TO LOSE IT AGAIN. BUT WHAT WE LOST WAS EVENTUALLY RETURNED TO US. ROLAND'S AND ENID'S TWISTED SUFFOCATED BODIES LIE DEEP WITHIN ME, PRESSED AGAINST MY EARTH-BOSOM. AND NOW IT IS *I* WHO CAN LAUGH...*LAUGH AT THE OTHERS*...



...FOR NOW I KNOW MY *REAL* FULFILLMENT. I WASN'T *LIKE* THE OTHERS *AFTER ALL*. THEY'RE ALL *SINGLE GRAVES*. I AM A *DOUBLE ONE!*

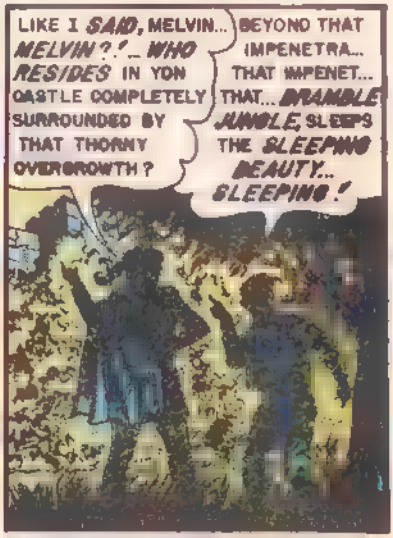
HEH, HEH. AND SO, KIDDIES... OUR LITTLE *YELP-YARN* ENDS ON THIS *GRAVE* NOTE. ROLAND AND ENID WERE *PUNISHED* FOR THEIR CRIME... *BURIED ALIVE*... BY *CYNTHIA'S CORPSE*, AND OUR LITTLE *GRAVE* ROTTED THEM *HAPPILY EVER AFTER*. SO NOW...*HUH?* WHERE'S *CYNTHIA* THESE DAYS, YOU ASK? WHY SHE JUST WANDERED AROUND TILL SHE FOUND SOME *OTHER* LONESOME GRAVE AND DROPPED IN ON *HER* FOR AN EXTENDED VISIT. 'BYE, NOW!

# THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S GRIM FAIRY TALE!



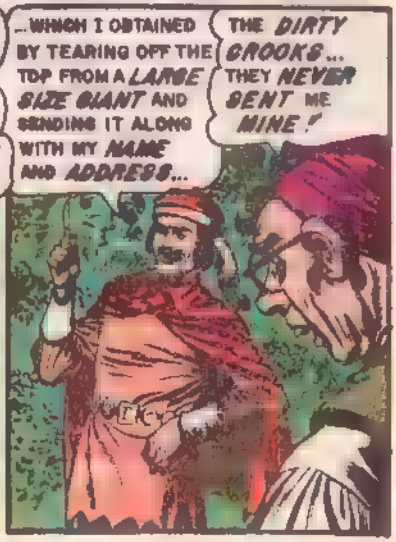
SO, IT IS I... THE HERO OF THIS MISERABLE FICTION.. CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING!
PLEASED T'MEET YUH! I'M MELVIN!

MELVIN??


LIKE I SAID, MELVIN... MELVIN?!.. WHO RESIDES IN YON CASTLE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY THAT THORNY OVERGROWTH?
BEYOND THAT IMPENETRA... THAT IMPENET... THAT... BRAMBLE JUNGLE, SLEEPS THE SLEEPING BEAUTY... SLEEPING!

AH! THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.. FAIR DAMSEL IN DISTRESS..AWAITING HER RESCUE.. WHOM I WILL FORTHWITH CARRY OUT!
CAN IT, BUSTER! THAT BRAMBLE BUSH IS IMPENETRA... IMPENET... IT'S THICK!

FEAR NOT, MY GOOD MAN. I, CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING, WILL HEW MY WAY THROUGH THAT GROWTH, WITH THIS...
ZOUNDS! GAZOOKS! JIMINY AND CRIKETS. A SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE!

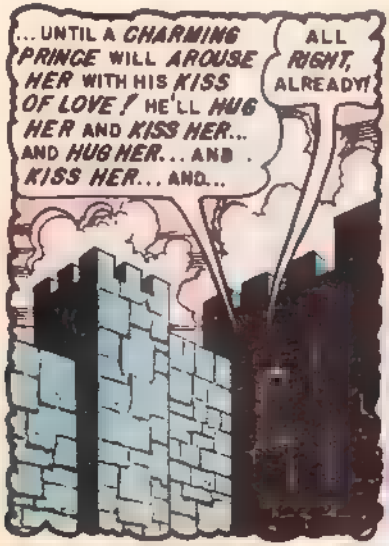

...WHICH I OBTAINED BY TEARING OFF THE TOP FROM A LARGE SIZE GIANT AND SENDING IT ALONG WITH MY NAME AND ADDRESS...
THE DIRTY CROOKS... THEY NEVER SENT ME MINE!

TELL ME, MY GOOD MAN. WHAT IS THE LEGEND OF THE SLEEPING BEAUTY?
DIG THE SQUARE! HE DON'T KNOW THE LEGEND!

WHY DOES THE SLEEPING BEAUTY SLEEP?
WHAT A GREEP! EVERYBODY KNOWS THE STORY OF THE SLEEPING BEAUTY!

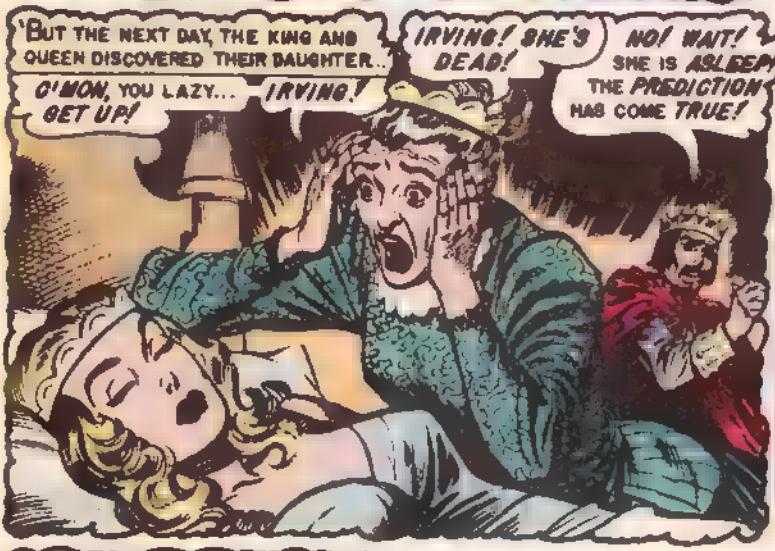
SO?
SO HOW SHOULD I KNOW?

ISN'T IT TRUE, MY GOOD MAN, THAT MANY YEARS AGO, A KING AND QUEEN LIVED IN THAT CASTLE?
IT FIGURES!
AND THE KING AND QUEEN WANTED A CHILD...VERY BADLY...
IT FIGURES!
VOTE
COUNT
OUVPEZ
LA PORTE
SHERIFF
AND FINALLY, THE QUEEN PRESENTED THE KING WITH A BOUNCING BABY GIRL...'
CATCH, IRVING!
WAAAHH!
NOT SO HARD, JOSEPHINE!
'THE KING WAS SO OVERJOYED WITH HIS NEW PRINCESS, THAT HE ISSUED AN INVITATION...'
HERE IS A LIST OF EVERYBODY WHO IS ANYBODY. INVITE THEM TO A FEAST... IN HONOR OF MY NEW DAUGHTER...
YES, YOUR MAJESTY!
'THE V.I.P.'S OF THE KINGDOM FLOCKED TO THE FLEAST...ER... FEAKED TO THE FLOST... ER... THEY CAME TO EAT...'
SOME SPREAD!
IT MUST BE JELLY, 'CAUSE JAM DON'T SHAKE LIKE THAT...
'BUT THE KING, WHO WAS A FORGETFUL KING, HAD FORGOTTEN TO INVITE ONE BIG WHEEL...'
AND NOW, LADIES AND GERMS... YOU WILL ALL MAKE A PREDICTION CONCERNING THE HAPPY FUTURE OF MY NEW DAUGHTER!
C'MON, ETHEL! THE PARTY'S GETTIN' DULL!
'THIS BIG WHEEL WAS FIT TO BE TIRED.. HEH, HEH... GET IT? TIRE? TIRED? WHEEL? TIRE ON THE WHEEL? OH, NEVER MIND! ANYWAY, THIS BIG WHEEL ROLLED IN AT THE HEIGHT OF THE FESTIVITIES...'
YOU WANT A PREDICTION, KING IRVING? ALL RIGHT! I'LL GIVE YOU ONE... THE PRINCESS WILL DIE ON HER EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY...
'EVERYONE AT THE FEAST WAS SHOCKED AT THE PREDICTION OF THE BIG-SHOT WHO WASN'T INVITED..'
DIG THE CREEP!
ALWAYS CLOWNING!
C'MON! SCRAM!
GATE-CRASHER
'BUT A THOUGHTFUL V.I.P. CALMED THE HORRIFIED GATHERING BY PUTTING IN HER TWO CENTS...'
ON HER EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY, THE PRINCESS WILL NOT DIE, BUT WILL GO TO SLEEP...
AW, C'MON, ETHEL. THIS PARTY IS GETTIN' REAL DULL!


...UNTIL A CHARMING PRINCE WILL AROUSE HER WITH HIS KISS OF LOVE! HE'LL HUG HER AND KISS HER... AND HUG HER... AND KISS HER... AND...
ALL RIGHT, ALREADY!

'AND SO IT CAME TO PASS THAT THE BABY PRINCESS GREW UP TO BECOME A LUSCIOUS CHICK THAT ANYBODY WOULD WANT TO HUG AND KISS...'
TOMORROW IS YOUR EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY, CHILD!
LISTEN, DAD! I'M NO CHILD! I'M A GROWN WOMAN. LOOK AT ME! LOOK!

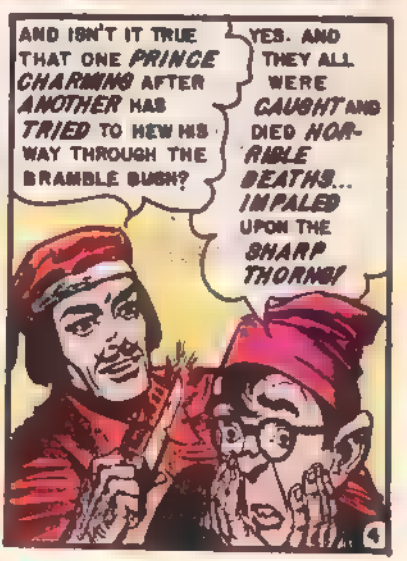
LISTEN, WOMAN! TOMORROW IS YOUR EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY. NOW I WANT YOU TO STAY IN YOUR ROOM! NOBODY SLEEPS 'ROUND HERE!
LOOK AT ME! LOOK!


'BUT THE NEXT DAY, THE KING AND QUEEN DISCOVERED THEIR DAUGHTER...
C'MON, YOU LAZY... GET UP!
IRVING!
IRVING! SHE'S DEAD!
NO! WAIT! SHE IS ASLEEP! THE PREDICTION HAS COME TRUE!

LOOK, IRVING! OUTSIDE THE CASTLE!
BRAMBLES HAVE GROWN UP OVERNIGHT, CREATING AN IMPENET... IMPENETRA... A THICK WALL OF THORNS...

HOW WILL WE GET OUT? HOW WILL THE DELIVERY MAN GET IN? WE'LL STARVE!
WHAT ABOUT MY BUSINESS?

THE PRINCE STOOD BEFORE MELVIN, CLASPING AND UNCLASPING HIS SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE...
ISN'T THAT THE STORY, MY GOOD MAN?
CORRECT! YOU HAVE WON THIRTY-TWO DUCATS! WOULD YOU LIKE TO TRY FOR SIXTY-FOUR?


AND ISN'T IT TRUE THAT ONE PRINCE CHARMING AFTER ANOTHER HAS TRIED TO HEW HIS WAY THROUGH THE BRAMBLE BUSH?
YES. AND THEY ALL WERE CAUGHT AND DIED HORRIBLE DEATHS... IMPALED UPON THE SHARP THORNS!

THE PRINCE STOOD UP, SQUARE AND STRONG...
THAT'S BECAUSE NONE OF THEM HAD A SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE!
IT FIGURES!
THE PRINCE TURNED TO THE BRAMBLES...
IT IS LATE! SOON IT WILL BE DARK! I MUST HURRY!
'BYE!
'BYE! HAPPY HEWING!
THE BRAVE PRINCE STRUCK OFF INTO THE THICK GROWTH OF THORNY BRAMBLES...
SEE HOW THE LETHALLY ARMED BRANCHES FALL BEFORE THE KEEN BLADE OF MY TRUSTY SOLID GOLD-PLATED BOY SCOUT KNIFE...
HOUR AFTER HOUR, HE HACKED...
WELL, WHAT DO YOU EXPECT? IT'S A HACK STORY!
... TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE PASSED DRIED-UP, SHRIVELED, MUMMIFIED BODIES OF PRINCE CHARMINGS WHO HAD VAINLY ATTEMPTED TO REACH THE SLEEPING BEAUTY...
... CHOKE...
... THE SUN WAS JUST BEGINNING TO SET WHEN CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING REACHED THE CASTLE DOOR...
ONE MORE HACK AND I'LL BE THROUGH...
EDITOR'S NOTE: ONE MORE HACK YARN LIKE THIS AND WE'LL ALL BE THROUGH...
FINALLY, THE PRINCE SWUNG OPEN THE CASTLE DOOR...
SLEEPING BEAUTY! I AM HERE!
BREATHLESSLY, HE RUSHED FROM ROOM TO ROOM...
SLEEPING BEAUTY? WHERE ARE YOU?
AND THEN...
AH! THE SLEEPING BEAUTY... SLEEPING!

CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING STOOD BEFORE THE SLEEPING SLEEPING BEAUTY...

MAN! WHAT A BEAUTY!

SLOWLY HE BENT AND KISSED HER...

OUTSIDE, THE SUN HAD SET. THE SLEEPING BEAUTY FLUTTERED HER EYELIDS... OPENED HER EYES...

IT IS I, SLEEPING BEAUTY! I HAVE RESCUED YOU!

THE SLEEPING BEAUT SAT UP...

ALL THESE *YEARS*, YOU HAVE *SLEPT*, UNTIL I...

*SUCKER!*

*HUH?*

ONLY IN THE *DAY-TIME* DO I *SLEEP*, CHUM!

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY LEAPED FROM HER BED...

AT *NIGHT*, I'M *WIDE AWAKE!* I GO *OUT* INTO THAT IMPENET... IMPENETRA... THAT *MESS* OUT THERE AND *FIND* THE SUCKERS WHO ARE *TRAPPED* IN IT...

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY'S FANGS GLISTENED...

...AND I *DRINK THEIR BLOOD!* FOR YOU SEE...

...AS SHE SUNK THEM INTO CHARMING PRINCE CHARMING'S THROAT...

I'M A *VAMPIRE*... SUCKER...

*GOOD LORD!*

HEH, HEH! WELL, THAT'S MY *CHILDISH CHILLER* FOR *THIS ISSUE*, CREEPS. HOPE YOU *LIKED* MY *NAUSEATING NURSERY NOVELETTE!* AND NOW, I SMELL *THE OLD WITCH'S* POT BREWING. THE OLD GAL IS WAITING TO FEED YOU *FOUL FARE* AND *WIND UP* MY *REEK-RAG*. SO I'LL BE *SHOVELING ALONG! READY? HOLD NOSE! EYES... RIGHT...*

THE END...

# THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

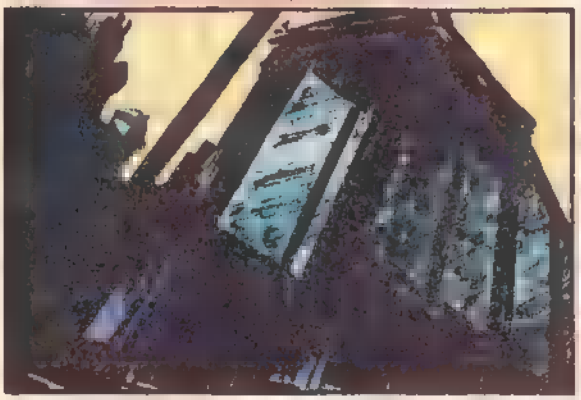
HEE, HEE! AND NOW IT'S *WIND-UP TIME* IN *C.K.'S MUCK-MAG*, AND YOUR *HOSTESS* IN *THE HAUNT OF FEAR*, YOUR *STEWER* OF *SEWER STORIES*, YOUR *DISHER-OUTER* OF *DELIRIOUS DESSERTS*, *THE OLD WITCH*, IS READY WITH HER *REEKING CAULDRON*. SO TUCK YOUR *DROOL CUPS* UNDER YOUR *QUIVERING CHINS* AND I'LL BEGIN THE *FOUL FARE* I CALL...

## SHADOW OF DEATH

COME WITH ME TO A LONELY CORNER ■ THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS SECTION OF A LARGE CITY. OVERHEAD, THE LAST FADING STAR IS FINALLY RETREATING BEFORE THE ADVANCING LIGHT OF DAWN, AND THE SLEEPING CITY IS AWAKENING TO THE SOUNDS OF JANGLING ALARM CLOCKS. BUT LONG BEFORE THE CITY'S OFFICE WORKERS AND BUSY HOUSEWIVES HAVE RISEN FROM THEIR WARM BEDS, EZRA MORTON HAS BEEN ON THE JOB. THERE HE IS NOW, UNLOCKING HIS LITTLE NEWSSTAND AND SWINGING WIDE ITS DOORS. NOTICE HOW EZRA LABORS, WINCING IN *PAIN*. YES, DEAR READER, EZRA IS AN *INVALID*... A *CRIPPLED NEWSDEALER*. EZRA MORTON IS PARALYZED FROM THE WAIST DOWN...

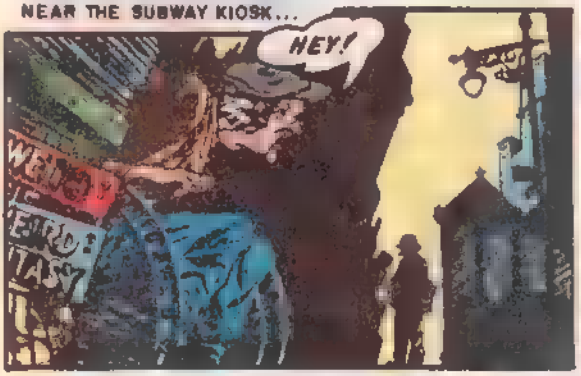
NOTICE THE BUNDLES OF MORNING NEWSPAPERS STACKED ON THE CURB BESIDE EZRA'S NEWSSTAND, READY TO BE UNTIED AND LAID OUT NEATLY ON DISPLAY. SEE HOW EZRA STRUGGLES, BENDING ■ HIS WHEELCHAIR AND LIFTING THE HEAVY PACKAGES...

NOW SEE THE DARK AND DESERTED SUBWAY KIOSK NEARBY, INTO WHICH, IN A FEW MINUTES, THE OFFICE-BOUND SECRETARIES AND THE FACTORY-BOUND LABORERS WILL BEGIN TO POUR, ARMED WITH THE NEWSPAPERS THEY HAVE PURCHASED FROM EZRA'S STAND...

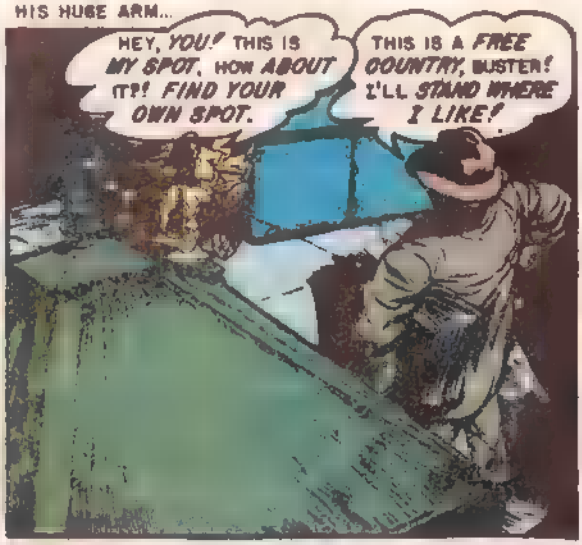


NOW, EZRA IS READY FOR THEM... FOR THE PARADE OF HUMANITY TO RUSH BY HIS STAND AND TOSS ITS COPPER PENNIES UPON HIS PAPERWEIGHTS AND EAT AWAY AT THE STACKS UNTIL ONLY A FEW LAST BATTERED COPIES REMAIN. SEE HOW HE SMILES...

YES, DEAR READER. EZRA SMILES. HE SMILES BECAUSE HE IS CONTENT. FOR THIS IS HIS *LIFE*... ALL THAT *MATTERS* TO HIM. THIS LITTLE NEWSTAND, WITH ITS FEW HUNDRED DAILY PAPER SALES, IS EZRA'S CASTLE. ITS MEAGER PROFIT IS THE LINE DRAWN BETWEEN INDEPENDENCE AND STARVATION FOR HIM. SO EZRA SMILES. BUT EZRA DOES NOT SMILE FOR *LONG*. SUDDENLY EZRA CATCHES SIGHT OF A FIGURE STANDING NEAR THE SUBWAY KIOSK...

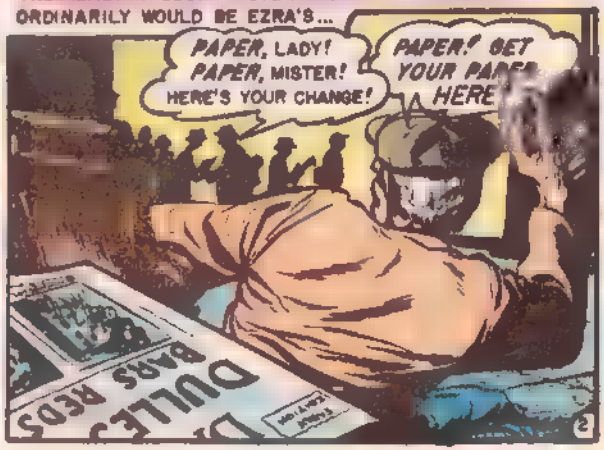



...A MAN CLUTCHING A STACK OF NEWSPAPERS UNDER HIS HUGE ARM...

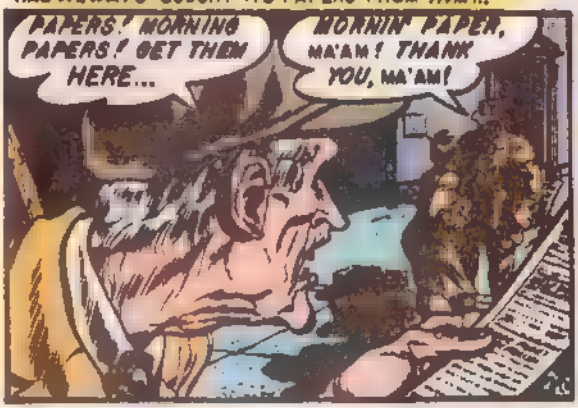



AND NOW THE PEOPLE ARE BEGINNING TO HURRY FROM ALL DIRECTIONS TOWARD THE SUBWAY ENTRANCE. AND THE BIG MAN WITH THE PAPERS UNDER HIS ARMS HURRIES TO MEET THEM ON STRONG LEGS THAT ARE NOT WITHERED AND PARALYZED AS EZRA'S ARE...

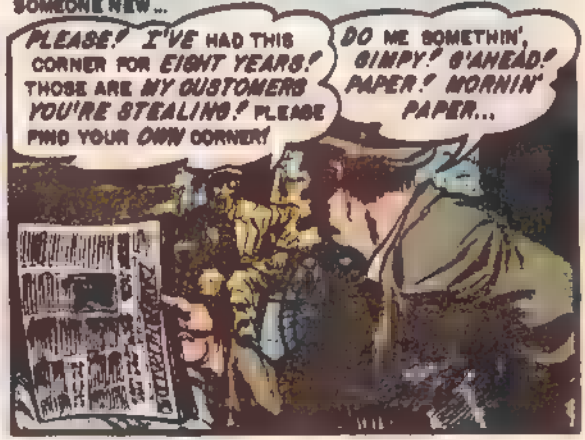
YES, EZRA DOES NOT SMILE. FEAR GRIPS EZRA'S HELPLESS BODY. THAT MAN...THAT MAN WITH THE PAPERS AND THE HEALTHY LEGS IS STEALING PAPER SALES THAT ORDINARILY WOULD BE EZRA'S...



EZRA BEGINS TO DO WHAT HE HAS *NEVER* DONE BEFORE. HE *CALLS OUT*, TRYING TO ATTRACT *ATTENTION, CALLING* FOR SALES, *IMPLORING, REMINDING* THE MASS OF HUMANITY WITH HEALTHY LEGS THAT IT HAS *ALWAYS* BOUGHT ITS PAPERS FROM *HIM*...




BUT THE SLEEPY-EYED PEOPLE ARE BLIND. IN THEIR RUSH TO CATCH THEIR TRAINS, THEY DO NOT NOTICE THAT THEY ARE BUYING THEIR MORNING PAPERS FROM SOMEONE NEW...




AND NOW, THE MORNING RUSH HOUR IS ALMOST OVER. EZRA'S PAPER STACKS STAND HIGH AND HARDLY TOUCHED. THE MAN WITH THE HEALTHY LEGS WAVES TO EZRA...

THE MAN MOVES OFF. EZRA STARES AT THE UNSOLD PAPERS PILED UPON HIS NEWSSTAND COUNTER...

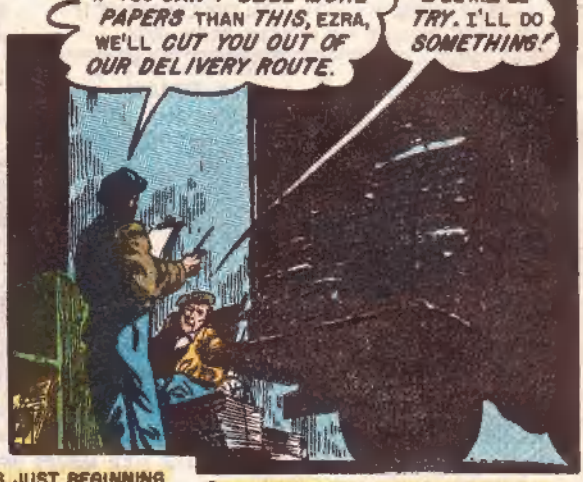
ALL DAY LONG, EZRA SITS IN HIS WHEELCHAIR TRYING TO SELL HIS PAPERS TO THE FEW WHO STRAGGLE BY HIS STAND...

FINALLY, DARKNESS BEGINS TO FALL. SADLY, EZRA TIES HIS UNSOLD PAPERS INTO BUNDLES AND DEPOSITS THEM ON THE CURB FOR THE TRUCKS TO PICK UP WHEN THEY DELIVER THE NEXT DAY'S EDITIONS...

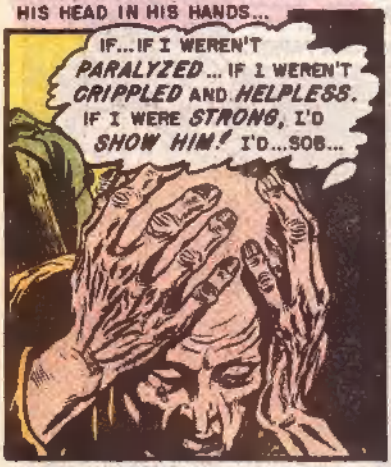
THE NEXT MORNING THE MAN IS THERE AGAIN, HURRYING ABOUT ON HIS STRONG LEGS SELLING HIS PAPERS TO THE UNAWARE PARADE, WHILE EZRA CRIES IN VAIN...

THE DAYS PASS. EVERY MORNING THE MAN IS THERE, STEALING SALES FROM EZRA. AND EVERY NIGHT, EZRA COUNTS HIS UNSOLD PAPERS AND TIES THEM INTO BUNDLES...

A WEEK GOES BY. TWO. ONE MORNING, A TRUCKMAN WHO DELIVERS EZRA'S PAPERS WARNS HIM...




BUT WHAT *CAN* EZRA DO? WHAT CAN A *CRIPPLE* DO TO A MAN WITH A *HEALTHY STRONG BODY?* THE TRUCKMAN LEAVES. EZRA SITS WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS...




ABOVE, THE SKY IS JUST BEGINNING TO GROW LIGHT. THE GLOW FROM A NEARBY STREETLAMP CASTS EZRA'S SHADOW UP AGAINST HIS NEWSSTAND...

SUDDENLY, EZRA'S SHADOW LIFTS ITS HEAD FROM ITS HANDS...

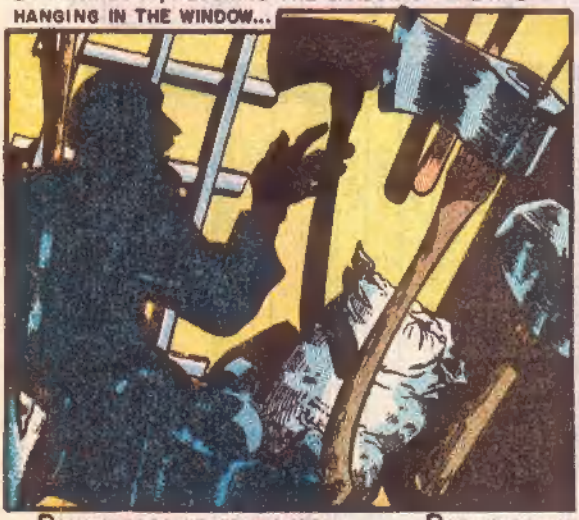
IT RISES FROM ITS WHEEL CHAIR, WAVERING...

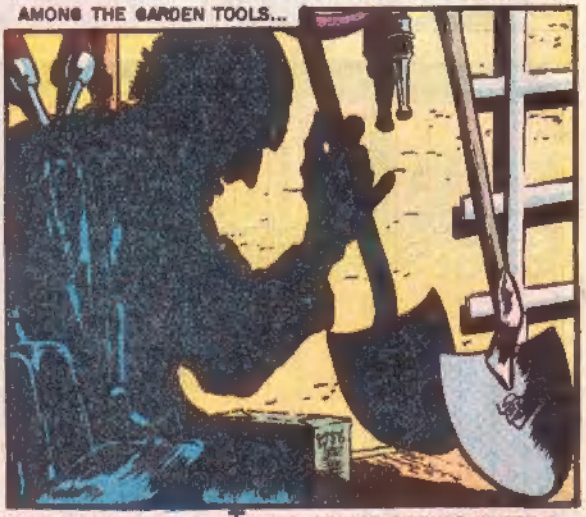
IT GLIDES OFF, DOWN THE DESERTED STREET, ON UNSTEADY LEGS...

IT SLIDES ACROSS BRICK WALLS...

...BOARD FENCES...

...HESITATES BEFORE A HARDWARE STORE...
WARE
PAINT


IT REACHES IN, PLUCKING THE SHADOW OF THE AXE HANGING IN THE WINDOW...


...LIFTING AWAY THE SHADOW OF THE SHOVEL STANDING AMONG THE GARDEN TOOLS...

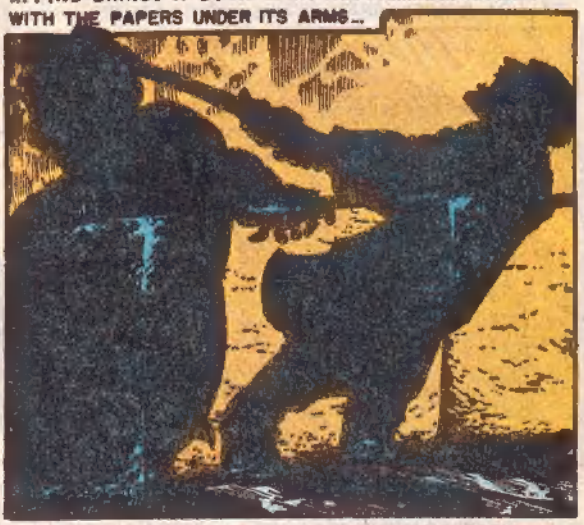
...BACK ACROSS BOARD FENCES...

...BACK ACROSS BRICK WALLS...

...TO A FAMILIAR CORNER WHERE A FAMILIAR SHADOW STANDS WITH THE SHADOW OF A HUGE BUNDLE OF PAPERS UNDER ITS ARMS...

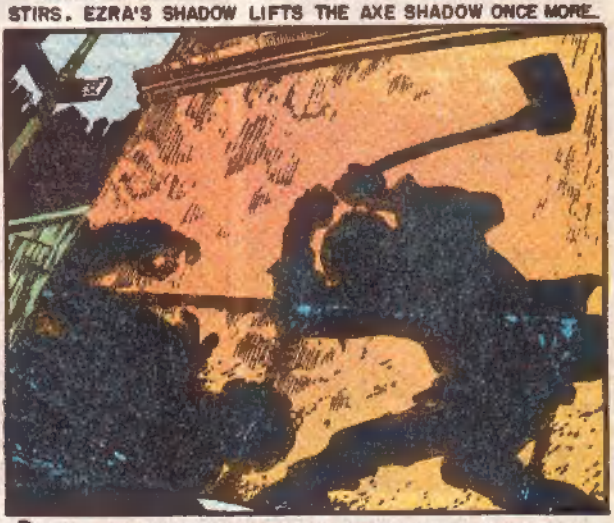
EZRA'S SHADOW LIFTS THE SHADOW OF THE AXE IT HAS STOLEN...

... AND BRINGS IT DOWN UPON THE FAMILIAR SHADOW WITH THE PAPERS UNDER ITS ARMS...



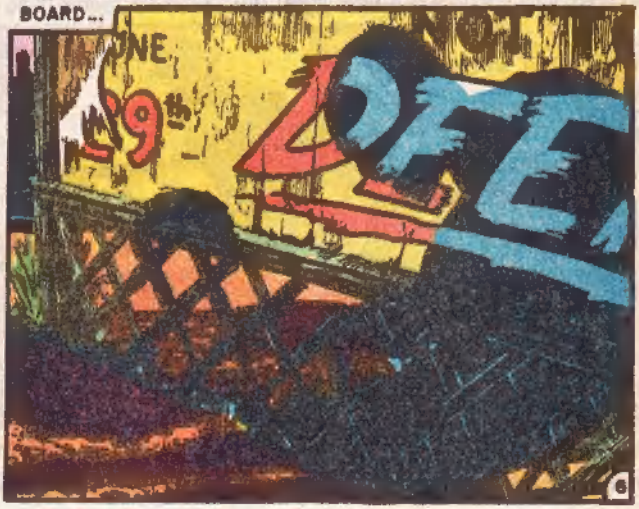
THE SHADOWS OF THE PAPERS SCATTER ACROSS THE BUILDING WALL AS THE FIGURE CRUMPLES, SPURTING A SHADOW-FOUNTAIN FROM ITS WOUND...

EZRA'S SHADOW PEERS AT IT. THE CRUMPLED SHADOW STIRS. EZRA'S SHADOW LIFTS THE AXE SHADOW ONCE MORE.

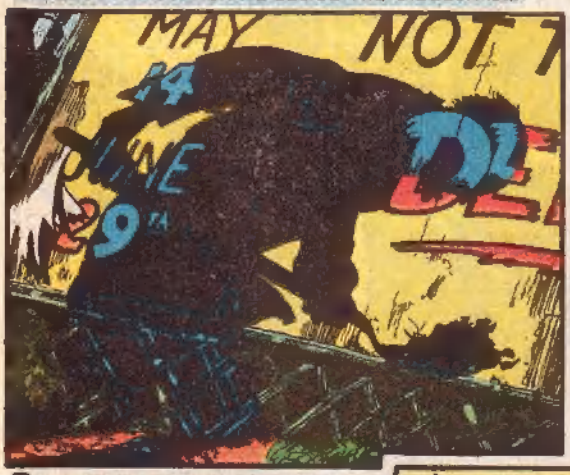


NOW EZRA'S SHADOW DRAGS THE LIFELESS SHADOW DOWN THE ALLEY BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS...

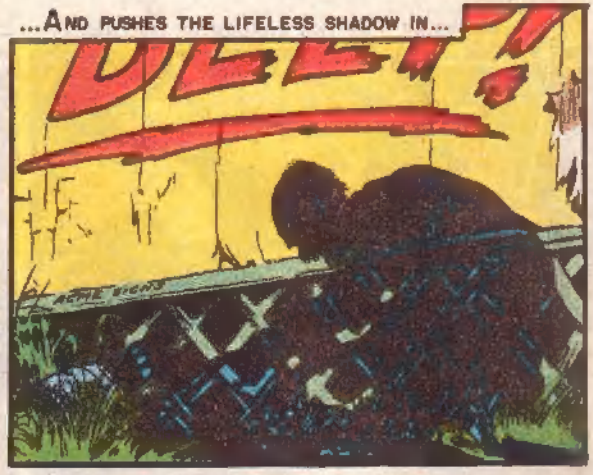
...DEPOSITING IT IN AN EMPTY LOT BESIDE A FADED BILL-BOARD...



WITH THE SHADOW-SHOVEL, EZRA'S SHADOW DIGS A SHALLOW SHADOW-GRAVE BESIDE THE BILLBOARD...




...AND PUSHES THE LIFELESS SHADOW IN...

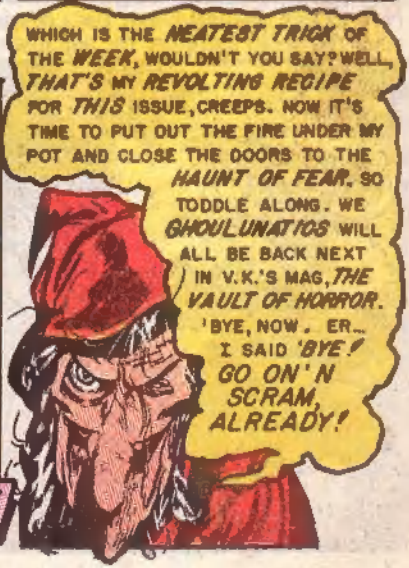


...AND SHOVELS THE SHADOW-SOIL IN UPON IT...

THEN, EZRA'S SHADOW RETURNS TO THE NEWSSTAND WHERE EZRA STILL SITS WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS...

...AND EZRA'S SHADOW ASSUMES EZRA'S POSITION AS EZRA HEARS...

EZRA ROLLS HIS WHEELCHAIR TO THE CRUMPLED FORM OF THE BIG MAN WITH THE HEALTHY LEGS LYING AMONG HIS SCATTERED PAPERS...

LATER, THE MORGUE-WAGON ATTENDANTS LIFT THE BODY OF THE MAN WHO ALMOST STOLE EZRA'S BUSINESS FROM HIM. AS THEY CARRY IT TO THE WAITING TRUCK, EZRA GASPS...

...FOR, ALTHOUGH THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING BRIGHTLY, *THE DEAD MAN'S BODY CASTS NO SHADOW...*